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ANWAR EL SADAT, A STATESMAN FOR PEACE

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ANWAR EL SADAT, A STATESMAN FOR PEACE

It was peasant roots, perhaps, and an early kinship to the land and its lure of autonomy, that crystallized Anwar el Sadat's vision of an independent Egypt, existing peacefully alongside her Arab and Israeli neighbors. Sadat firmly held this vision of a sovereign Egypt as he planned, step by step, to break the diplomatic logjam in the contentious Arab/Israeli relationship. It was this vision that gave birth to the fortitude, courage and hope of a generation of men and women, who to this day continue to seek peace for the Middle East.

This paper is an attempt to present the Egyptian President's strategy, or roadmap, used to realize his goals. It will highlight Sadat's analysis of the domestic and international environments, and demonstrate how he handled the many constraints, threats and opportunities he saw before him. The paper will consider Sadat's priorities and objectives, and illustrate his supreme mastery of policy instruments. In all, it will show how he used available means to achieve his most vital end. The paper will show the splendid statecraft of Anwar el Sadat, one which continues to serve the Middle East well, long after his death.

To begin, Sadat saw Egypt's national interest to be its liberation from foreign imperialism and devastating economic woes (Fernandez-Armesto 126-128). To achieve this, Egypt would have to forge a lasting peace with Israel, re-gain control of the Suez Canal, extract itself from Soviet influence, and revamp its

economic policies to attract the West. The vast resources funnelled to the military, and the singular Egyptian focus on Israel as the enemy, could then be turned toward productive economic endeavors. Ultimately, Egypt would secure its rightful place in a unified Arab world, with Anwar el Sadat as its unchallenged leader (O'Neill 28).

There were several threats to the fulfillment of Sadat's goals. The conflict between Israel and the Arab world mandated that virtually all of Egypt's resources be poured into military preparedness (Sadat 241, 245). This was especially troublesome since the 1967 war had devastated the Egyptian armed forces, along with the country's pride. There was no peace, and there was no war...only skirmishes that sapped Egyptian military assets and Egypt's psyche (O'Neill 28). With state-of-the-art U.S. military assistance, Israel dominated the region. Under these circumstances, if any negotiation did take place, Israel would not have to compromise with the Arab world, and Sadat's position, therefore, would be one of extreme weakness (Kissinger 460).

Furthermore, the U.S. and Soviets concentrated on detente, and ignored the Middle East. The Soviets had no diplomatic relations with Israel, and thus no channel to press for compromise even if they were willing to do so. On the other hand, the U.S. appeared unconcerned and unwilling to push for Israeli concessions, especially since Egypt had suffered resounding defeat. World public opinion also sided with Israel and seemed to be satisfied with the status quo (O'Neill 30).

Sadat found this situation unacceptable. He determined that a new negotiating context had to be created whereby both Israel and Egypt would banquet at the bargaining table as equals (Kissinger 460). This became particularly critical when the People's Assembly highlighted Egypt's economic plight, and questioned the reality of Sadat's plans for war, thus threatening his domestic political position (Fernandez-Armesto 99). Sadat recognized that his agenda was unattainable without a military victory---his only choice was war.

President Sadat had no difficulty assessing the balance of power in the region. Simply put, Israel was superior, backed by the U.S.; Egypt was a third class citizen on the world scene, poorly backed by the Soviet Union. He factored this into his overall strategy.

There were several constraints with which Sadat had to contend; the most vital was Egypt's military competence. The troops were basically untrained, armed with inferior Soviet equipment, and clearly not a match for Israeli capabilities. But, using every opportunity at hand, Sadat compensated for this. He ousted the retired-in-place War Minister in favor of an activist who wisely used the immense war allocation for innovations. The new Commander in Chief raised the Egyptian fortification on the Sinai to 65 feet, topping the Israeli wall. This boosted officer self-confidence, since they could now see (into the Sinai) what before they could only fear (Sadat 237). Even so, Sadat's military choices narrowed to one: a limited military target with a true chance of success.

The Soviet presence in Egypt was also a constraint. Sadat began to rectify this situation in the summer of 1972, expelling some 15,000 Soviet advisors (Sadat 230). Although the Soviets were a source of military capability, their removal from Egypt was essential to the overall strategy. This is because Sadat concluded that only the U.S. could bring the Israelis to the negotiating table, and they would not do this at the behest of Soviet clientele (Sadat 293). Indeed, Soviet patronage of Egypt fed the Israeli cause, making their case even stronger for continued U.S. military assistance (Fernandez-Armesto 129). Freedom from Soviet influence, in the long term, would permit economic/commercial policies to be instituted to attract Western foreign investment. In the short term, it left Sadat unhampered to prepare for war (Sadat 231).

Sadat's war plan aimed at several objectives. Egypt had to be perceived as triumphant; no matter how small the territorial victory, it would be the great equalizer between Egypt and Israel in any peace negotiation (Kissinger 460). Having suffered defeat, Israel would no longer be indisputably superior, trusting in territory alone to provide its security (O'Neill 32). The war would also propel the U.S. into the role of arbiter, and in the end, the guarantor of peace, since Sadat presumed the U.S. to be the only power capable of steering Israel toward realistic compromise (Fernandez-Armesto 141). But, because Egypt had been humiliated and dishonored in 1967, a victory, even if only limited, could stir the "martyrs" into believing they must be part of a Holy Jihad ending in Jerusalem, just as they had been

stirred before the 1967 war (Fernandez-Armesto 126-128). Sadat had to be watchful here.

All this re-confirmed Sadat's convictions: a war strategy to rebuild Arab self-esteem and confidence, and recapture territory had to be formulated. Further, it had to be the vital spark plug for peace negotiations with Israel.

Sadat's plan of action was constructed with several policy instruments: diplomacy, persuasion, deception, coercion and public opinion. He risked that ingrained Western and Israeli perceptions of the status quo would not permit anyone to believe Egypt would go to war. Each tool was geared to specific intermediate objectives.

Using personal relationships and forceful magnetism, Sadat launched his diplomatic offensive (Sadat 239). He persuaded Syria to provide a second battle front for the war, and he convinced the Arab World to use the "oil weapon" to pressure Europe and Japan to endorse Arab demands. His diplomatic efforts also resulted in every Black African country severing relations with Israel (O'Neill 31), and most of the Third World siding with the Arabs, capped by President Tito donating 140 tanks to the effort (Sadat 255).

Kissinger has called Sadat's deception a classic example of strategic and tactical surprise (459). This policy instrument had Sadat confiding to a certain European Foreign Minister his intention to be at UN Headquarters in October 1973 (this was for his President's information, but to be kept a secret beyond that). Sadat counted on a quick message transmittal to Israel

(Sadat 244). His most effective deceit, however, was "crying wolf" three times before he finally went to war. Israel reacted to Sadat's first two war announcements by preparing themselves at a cost of \$10 million each time. In both cases nothing happened. But, the third time, Israel yawned, and Egypt attacked. Finally, Sadat chose Yom Kippur for the actual attack, a Jewish holiday which would have Israel's infrastructure temporarily closed (Sadat 241-242). Notwithstanding the facts, Sadat's deception worked because both Israel and the U.S. had an underlying perception that Egypt would not, indeed could not, go to war (Kissinger 459).

Another policy instrument was coercion. Sadat once explained to Nasser that to re-gain even four inches of the lost territory would have the world treating Arabs with new respect. He held that whomever prevailed after the first 24 hours of war would essentially be victorious (Sadat 244). Thus, Sadat's limited target needed to score high Israeli casualties, permit Egypt to re-claim the canal and some territory, and coerce the U.S. and Israel, to participate in a peace process, supported by the Western World (Sadat 293).

Sadat's plan triumphed; he achieved superiority in the first twenty-four hours. Only when the U.S. fortified Israel did the Egyptian army begin to crumble. But, by then, it was too late...an overall Arab victory had been secured. On October 19, fearing war with the U.S., Sadat notified his partner in the war episode, Syrian President al-Assad, that he intended to request and accept a cease-fire (Sadat 259). The desired ends were

consummated: the U.S. eventually brought a more compromising Israel to the peace table, Egypt was truly independent, and she again controlled the canal, a first step in restoring the battered economy.

Anwar el Sadat had a clear and exact vision of what he wanted to achieve, and the charisma to move and inspire the Arab World toward these ends. Sadat was a pragmatist, ever-aware of the lost opportunity cost of non-action. Conscious of the many constraints to his plan, he compensated by maximizing every opportunity that presented itself. Sadat had the flexibility to meet ever-changing reality. Yet, his credibility endured, achieving and sustaining Arab consensus.

By any measure, Sadat was a remarkable statesman. His bold action elevated him to the unchallenged leadership of the Arab World. He gave those who continue to search for the illusive peace a legacy of courage and hope which strengthens their resolve. The recent Palestine Liberation Organization and Israeli treaty is yet another building block to this legacy and a tribute to Sadat. Most importantly, such events permit the world to renew its hope for all of our tomorrows.

Sadat teaches that it is essential to have a solid vision, and to delineate vital objectives from marginally important ones. His experience dictates an accurate evaluation of one's own power, along with the constraints and opportunities which affect its use. We see Sadat squarely facing his constraints as a key ingredient in the recipe for the most effective strategy. His

quest for peace illustrates a strategy which smartly and intuitively used available means to obtain desired ends.

One final note: Sadat's statecraft provides one with renewed appreciation for the crucial coupling of artful diplomacy with the skill of battle, and the complementary nature of each for the other. This is an important lesson for students at the National War College, and I hope the study of Anwar el Sadat will continue here for years to come.

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